

FORM PTO-1390
(REV 10-2000)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER

**TRANSMITTAL LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES
DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE (DO/EO/US)
CONCERNING A FILING UNDER 35 U.S.C. 371**

LUS-13047

U.S. APPLICATION NO. (If known, see 37 CFR 1.5)

10/088056

INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO.
PCT/CH99/00434

INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE
14 September 1999

PRIORITY DATE CLAIMED
14 September 1999

TITLE OF INVENTION MIXTURE OF TWO PARTICULATE PHASES USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF A GREEN
COMPACT THAT CAN BE SINTERED AT HIGHER TEMPERATURES

APPLICANT(S) FOR DO/EO/US
FEICHTINGER, Heinrich

Applicant herewith submits to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information:

1. ☒ This is a **FIRST** submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371.
2. ☐ This is a **SECOND** or **SUBSEQUENT** submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371.
3. ☐ This is an express request to promptly begin national examination procedures (35 U.S.C. 371(f)).
4. ☒ The US has been elected by the expiration of 19 months from the priority date (PCT Article 31).
5. ☒ A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2))
 - a. ☐ is attached hereto (required only if not communicated by the International Bureau).
 - b. ☒ has been communicated by the International Bureau.
 - c. ☐ is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US).
6. ☒ An English language translation of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)).
7. ☒ Amendments to the claims of the International Application under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3))
 - a. ☐ are attached hereto (required only if not communicated by the International Bureau).
 - b. ☐ have been communicated by the International Bureau.
 - c. ☐ have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments has NOT expired.
 - d. ☒ have not been made and will not be made.
8. ☐ An English language translation of the amendments to the claims under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)).
9. ☐ An oath or declaration of the inventor(s) (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(4)).
10. ☒ An English language translation of the annexes to the International Preliminary Examination Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(5)).

Items 11 to 16 below concern document(s) or information included:

11. ☐ An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98.
12. ☐ An assignment document for recording. A separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3.28 and 3.31 is included.
13. ☒ A **FIRST** preliminary amendment.
☐ A **SECOND** or **SUBSEQUENT** preliminary amendment.
14. ☐ A substitute specification.
15. ☐ A change of power of attorney and/or address letter.
16. ☒ Other items or information:
International Preliminary Examination Report.
Application Data Sheet.

U.S. APPLICATION NO (if known, see 37 CFR 1.5) 10/088056		INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO PCT/CH99/00434		ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER LUS-13047	
--	--	--	--	---------------------------------------	--

<p>17. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The following fees are submitted:</p> <p>BASIC NATIONAL FEE (37 CFR 1.492 (a) (1) - (5)) :</p> <p>Neither international preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) nor international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO and International Search Report not prepared by the EPO or JPO \$1000.00</p> <p>International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but International Search Report prepared by the EPO or JPO \$860.00</p> <p>International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO \$710.00</p> <p>International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO (37 CFR 1.482) but all claims did not satisfy provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$690.00</p> <p>International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO (37 CFR 1.482) and all claims satisfied provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$100.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ENTER APPROPRIATE BASIC FEE AMOUNT =</p> <p>Surcharge of \$130.00 for furnishing the oath or declaration later than <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 30 months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(e)).</p> <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width:15%;">CLAIMS</th> <th style="width:20%;">NUMBER FILED</th> <th style="width:20%;">NUMBER EXTRA</th> <th style="width:15%;">RATE</th> <th style="width:15%;"></th> <th style="width:15%;"></th> </tr> <tr> <td>Total claims</td> <td>23 - 20 =</td> <td>3</td> <td>X \$18.00</td> <td>\$</td> <td>54.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Independent claims</td> <td>1 - 3 =</td> <td>0</td> <td>X \$80.00</td> <td>\$</td> <td>0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM(S) (if applicable)</td> <td>+ \$270.00</td> <td>\$</td> <td>0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: right;">TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =</td> <td>\$</td> <td>1,074.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4"> <input type="checkbox"/> Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27. The fees indicated above are reduced by 1/2. </td> <td>\$</td> <td>0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: right;">SUBTOTAL =</td> <td>\$</td> <td>1,074.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">Processing fee of \$130.00 for furnishing the English translation later than <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 30 months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(f)).</td> <td>\$</td> <td>0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: right;">TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =</td> <td>\$</td> <td>1,074.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31). \$40.00 per property</td> <td>\$</td> <td>0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: right;">TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =</td> <td>\$</td> <td>1,074.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4"></td> <td style="text-align: right;">Amount to be refunded:</td> <td>\$</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4"></td> <td style="text-align: right;">charged:</td> <td>\$</td> </tr> </table> <p>a. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A check in the amount of \$ <u>1,074.00</u> to cover the above fees is enclosed.</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Please charge my Deposit Account No. <u>18-0160</u> in the amount of \$ _____ to cover the above fees. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.</p> <p>c. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. <u>18-0160</u>. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed. Our Order No. LUS-13047</p> <p>NOTE: Where an appropriate time limit under 37 CFR 1.494 or 1.495 has not been met, a petition to revive (37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b)) must be filed and granted to restore the application to pending status.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> <p>SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO</p> <p>Customer No. 007609</p> <p>Rankin, Hill, Porter & Clark LLP</p> <p>700 Huntington Building</p> <p>925 Euclid Avenue</p> <p>Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1405</p> </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: center;"> <p>_____ SIGNATURE</p> <p>David E. Spaw _____ NAME</p> <p>34732 _____ REGISTRATION NUMBER</p> </div> </div>	CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE			Total claims	23 - 20 =	3	X \$18.00	\$	54.00	Independent claims	1 - 3 =	0	X \$80.00	\$	0.00	MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM(S) (if applicable)			+ \$270.00	\$	0.00	TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =				\$	1,074.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27. The fees indicated above are reduced by 1/2.				\$	0.00	SUBTOTAL =				\$	1,074.00	Processing fee of \$130.00 for furnishing the English translation later than <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 30 months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(f)).				\$	0.00	TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =				\$	1,074.00	Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31). \$40.00 per property				\$	0.00	TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =				\$	1,074.00					Amount to be refunded:	\$					charged:	\$
CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE																																																																											
Total claims	23 - 20 =	3	X \$18.00	\$	54.00																																																																									
Independent claims	1 - 3 =	0	X \$80.00	\$	0.00																																																																									
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM(S) (if applicable)			+ \$270.00	\$	0.00																																																																									
TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =				\$	1,074.00																																																																									
<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27. The fees indicated above are reduced by 1/2.				\$	0.00																																																																									
SUBTOTAL =				\$	1,074.00																																																																									
Processing fee of \$130.00 for furnishing the English translation later than <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 30 months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(f)).				\$	0.00																																																																									
TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =				\$	1,074.00																																																																									
Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31). \$40.00 per property				\$	0.00																																																																									
TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =				\$	1,074.00																																																																									
				Amount to be refunded:	\$																																																																									
				charged:	\$																																																																									

Application Data Sheet Application Information

Application Type::	Regular
Subject Matter::	Utility
Suggested classification::	
Suggested Group Art Unit::	
CD-ROM or CD-R?::	None
Number of CD disks::	0
Number of copies of CDs::	0
Sequence submission?::	No
Computer Readable Form (CRF)?::	No
Number of copies of CRF::	0
Title ::	MIXTURE OF TWO PARTICULATE PHASES USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF A GREEN COMPACT THAT CAN BE SINTERED AT HIGHER TEMPERATURES
Attorney Docket Number::	LUS-13047
Request for Early Publication?::	No
Request for Non-Publication?::	No
Suggested Drawing Figure::	N/A
Total Drawing Sheets::	0
Small Entity?::	No
Latin name::	
Variety denomination name::	
Petition included?::	No
Petition Type::	
Licensed US Govt. Agency::	
Contract or Grant Numbers::	
Secrecy Order in Parent Appl.?::	No

Applicant Information

Applicant Authority Type::	Inventor
Primary Citizenship Country::	Switzerland
Status::	Full Capacity
Given Name::	Heinrich
Middle Name::	
Family Name::	Feichtinger
Name Suffix::	
City of Residence::	<u>Zürich</u> CHX
State or Province of Residence::	
Country of Residence::	Switzerland
Street of mailing address::	Technoparkstrasse 1
City of mailing address::	Zürich
State or Province of mailing address::	
Country of mailing address::	Switzerland
Postal or Zip Code of mailing address::	CH-8005

Correspondence Information

Correspondence Customer Number :: 007609
Phone number:: 216-566-9700
Fax Number: 216-566-9711
E-Mail address:: spaw@rankinhill.com

Representative Information

Representative Customer Number::	007609	
----------------------------------	--------	--

Domestic Priority Information

Application::	Continuity Type::	Parent Application::	Parent Filing Date::
This Application	National Stage of	PCT/CH99/00434	09/14/99

Foreign Priority Information

Country::	Application number::	Filing Date::	Priority Claimed::

Assignee Information

Assignee name::	STRATEC MEDICAL AG
Street of mailing address::	Eimattstrasse 3
City of mailing address::	Oberdorf
State or Province of mailing address::	
Country of mailing address::	Switzerland
Postal or Zip Code of mailing address::	CH-4436

PATENT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Heinrich Feichtinger
Serial No.: N/A Art Unit: N/A
Filing Date: Herewith
International
Application No.: PCT/CH99/00434
International
Filing Date: 14 September 1999
Title: MIXTURE OF TWO PARTICULATE PHASES USED IN THE
PRODUCTION OF A GREEN COMPACT THAT CAN BE
SINTERED AT HIGHER TEMPERATURES
Examiner: N/A
Docket No.: LUS-13047

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT "A"

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Please amend the above-identified application, prior to examination thereof, in the
following manner.

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (amended) A mixture of two particulate phases to be used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures, wherein

A) a first phase contains particles that consist of a metal compound;

B) a second phase contains particles selected from a group of inorganic compounds which at temperatures beyond 400°C do not release any decomposition products that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase and/or react with said phase to form stable compounds; and

C) that the inorganic compounds are selected from a group consisting of alkali halogenides and alkaline earth halogenides.

2. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the metal compound is a titan compound.

3. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase of the mixture additionally comprises particles that consist of a metal.

4. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase of the mixture additionally comprises particles that consist of a metal alloy.

5. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inorganic compounds are selected from the following group: NaCl, CaF₂, K₃AlF₆ and Na₃AlF₆.

6. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the bodies of the first and/or the second phase are agglomerates or shaped corpuscles of powder particles that are kept in place by means of a binder that disintegrates and/or evaporates at temperatures below the beginning of the sintering process.

7. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises oxides of at least one of the metals that form the sintered alloy.

8. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises nitrides of at least one of the metals that form the sintered alloy.

9. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises hydrides of at least one of the metals that form the sintered alloy.

10. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises particles consisting of titanium hydride.

11. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least part of the particles of the first phase are provided with a metal coating which in contact with the other components of the first phase form, at least at the beginning of the sintering process, a low melting point alloy and that after termination of the sintering process the concentration of this metal in the alloy corresponds to the desired value.

12. (amended) The mixture as claimed in claim 1, wherein, in addition to the first

and second phases, the mixture further comprises a third phase in the form of an organic or inorganic binder in a composition corresponding to that used in powder injection molding.

13. (amended) A method for producing a shaped body that can be sintered at higher temperatures as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first and second phases composing the mixture are homogeneously mixed and that subsequently said mixture is inserted into a mold which at the sintering temperature is thermally and chemically stable.

14. (amended) A shaped body capable of being sintered, which is obtained by the method according to claim 13.

15. (amended) A method for producing shaped metal bodies with interconnecting pore structures by using the shaped body capable of being sintered as claimed in claim 14, comprising the step of: heating of the green compact until the particles of the first phase are sintered so as to form an interconnecting pore structure, the particles of the second phase being eliminated from the pores of the shaped body during or subsequent to the sintering process.

16. (amended) The method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the elimination of the particles of the second phase takes place prior to or during the sintering process at a temperature beyond 400°C.

17. (amended) The method as claimed in claim 16, wherein the elimination of

the particles of the second phase takes place subsequent to the sintering process by dissolving out said particles using a solvent.

18. (amended) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein after having undergone the sintering process, the shaped body is treated with a liquid and/or a vaporous alkali metal or alkaline earth metal.

19. (amended) A shaped metal body obtained in accordance with the method of claim 18.

20. (amended) The shaped metal body as claimed in claim 19, wherein the pores of the interconnecting pore structure have a diameter inferior to 0.4 mm.

21. (amended) A utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 19 as a surgical implant or as a coating for a surgical implant.

22. (amended) A utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 19 as a structural member for applications in lightweight construction.

23. (amended) A utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 19 as an electrode material.

IN THE ABSTRACT:

Please replace the original abstract with the following:

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A mixture of two particulate phases used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures. The first phase contains particles that consist of a metal and/or a metal alloy and/or a metal compound. The second phase contains particles from the group of the inorganic compounds that do not release any decomposition products at temperatures of more than 400 °C, that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase, and/or that react with the second phase to stable compounds. The mixture, by providing the second phase, is effective in supporting the fine structure of the first phase against the forces of surface tensions during the sintering process. During sintering, the second phase remains thermally stable and substantially chemically inert with respect to the first phase.

REMARKS

Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the application by the present Amendment. If clarification of the amendment or application is desired, or if issues are present which the Examiner believes may be quickly resolved, the Examiner is invited to initiate a telephone interview with the undersigned attorney to expedite prosecution of the present application.

If there are any additional fees resulting from this communication, please charge same to our Deposit Account No. 18-0160, our Order No. LUS-13047.

Respectfully submitted,

RANKIN, HILL, PORTER & CLARK LLP

By: _____


David E. Spaw, Reg. No. 34732

700 Huntington Building
925 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1405
(216) 566-9700
Customer No. 007609

Attachment: Marked-up version of Amendments

Marked-up Version of AmendmentIN THE CLAIMS:

The claims have been amended as follows:

1. (amended) A mixture of two particulate phases to be used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures, ~~[characterized in that]~~ wherein

~~[A) the]~~ A) a first phase contains particles that consist of a metal compound;

B) ~~[the]~~ a second phase contains particles selected from ~~[the]~~ a group of ~~[the]~~ inorganic compounds which at temperatures beyond 400 ~~[DEG]~~°C do not release any decomposition products that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase and/or react with said phase to form stable compounds; and

C) that the inorganic compounds are selected from ~~[the]~~ a group consisting of ~~[the]~~ alkali halogenides ~~[or]~~ and alkaline earth halogenides.

2. (amended) ~~[A]~~ The mixture as claimed in claim 1, ~~[characterised in that]~~ wherein the metal compound is a titan compound.

3. (amended) ~~[A]~~ The mixture as claimed in claim 1 ~~[or 2, characterised in that]~~, wherein the first phase of the mixture additionally comprises particles ~~[which]~~ that consist of a metal.

Marked-up Version of Amendment

4. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in claim 1 ~~[or 2, characterised in that]~~, wherein the first phase of the mixture additionally comprises particles ~~[which]~~ that consist of a metal alloy.

5. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~[any one of the claims 1 to 4, characterised in that]~~ claim 1, wherein the inorganic compounds are selected from the following group: NaCl, CaF₂, K₃AlF₆ and Na₃AlF₆.

6. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~[any of the claims 1 to 5, characterised in that]~~ claim 1, wherein the bodies of the first and/or the second phase are agglomerates or shaped corpuscles of powder particles ~~[which]~~ that are kept in place by means of a binder that disintegrates and/or evaporates at temperatures below the beginning of the sintering process.

7. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~[any of the claims 1 to 6, characterised in that]~~ claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises oxides of at least one of the metals ~~[which]~~ that form the sintered alloy.

8. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~[any of the claims 1 to 6, characterised in that]~~ claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises nitrides of at least one of the metals ~~[which]~~ that form the sintered alloy.

Marked-up Version of Amendment

9. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~{any of the claims 1 to 6,~~
~~characterised in that}~~ claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises hydrides of at least one
of the metals ~~{which}~~ that form the sintered alloy.

10. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~{any of the claims 1 to 9,~~
~~characterised in that}~~ claim 1, wherein the first phase comprises particles consisting of
titanium hydride.

11. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~{any of the claims 1 to 10,~~
~~characterised in that}~~ claim 1, wherein at least part of the particles of the first phase are
provided with a metal coating which in contact with the other components of the first
phase form, at least at the beginning of the sintering process, a low melting point alloy
and that after termination of the sintering process the concentration of this metal in the
alloy corresponds to the desired value.

12. (amended) [A] The mixture as claimed in ~~{any of the claims 1 to 11,~~
~~characterised in that}~~ claim 1, wherein, in addition to the first and second phases ~~{it~~
~~contains},~~ the mixture further comprises a third phase in the form of an organic or
inorganic binder in a composition corresponding to that used in powder injection
~~{moulding}~~ molding.

13. (amended) A method for producing a shaped body that can be sintered at
higher temperatures as claimed in ~~{any of the claims 1 to 12, characterised in that}~~ claim

Marked-up Version of Amendment

1, wherein the first and second phases composing the mixture are homogeneously mixed and that subsequently said mixture is inserted into a ~~{mould}~~ mold which at the sintering temperature is thermally and chemically stable.

14. (amended) A shaped body capable of being sintered, which is obtained by the ~~{methods}~~ method according to claim 13.

15. (amended) A method for producing shaped metal bodies with interconnecting pore structures by using the shaped body capable of being sintered as claimed in claim 14, ~~{characterised by the following procedure step}~~ comprising the step of: heating of the green compact until the particles of the first phase are sintered so as to form an interconnecting pore structure, the particles of the second phase being eliminated from the pores of the shaped body during or subsequent to the sintering process.

16. (amended) ~~{A}~~ The method as claimed in claim 15, ~~{characterised in that}~~ wherein the elimination of the particles of the second phase takes place prior to or during the sintering process at a temperature beyond 400 ~~{DEG}~~°C.

17. (amended) ~~{A}~~ The method as claimed in claim 16, ~~{characterised in that}~~ wherein the elimination of the particles of the second phase takes place subsequent to the sintering process by dissolving out said particles using a solvent.

Marked-up Version of Amendment

18. (amended) ~~[A]~~ The method as claimed in ~~[any of the claims 13 to 17,~~
~~characterised in that]~~ claim 17, wherein after having undergone the sintering process,
the shaped body is treated with a liquid and/or a vaporous alkali metal or alkaline earth
metal.

19. (amended) A shaped metal body obtained in accordance with ~~[any of]~~ the
method ~~[claims 13 to]~~ of claim 18.

20. (amended) ~~[A]~~ The shaped metal body as claimed in claim 19, ~~[characterised~~
~~in that]~~ wherein the pores of the interconnecting pore structure have a diameter inferior
to 0.4 mm.

21. (amended) A ~~[utilisation]~~ utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed in
claim 19 ~~[or 20]~~ as a surgical implant or as a coating for a surgical implant.

22. (amended) A ~~[utilisation]~~ utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed
in claim 19 ~~[or 20]~~ as a structural member for applications in lightweight construction.

23. (amended) A ~~[utilisation]~~ utilization of the shaped metal body as claimed
in claim 19 ~~[or 20]~~ as an electrode material.

Marked-up Version of Amendment

IN THE ABSTRACT:

The Abstract of the Disclosure has been amended as follows:

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

[The invention relates to a] A mixture of two particulate phases [which is] used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures. [According to the invention, A) the] The first phase contains particles that consist of a metal and/or a metal alloy and/or a metal compound[, and B) the] The second phase contains particles from the group of the inorganic compounds [which] that do not release any decomposition products at temperatures of more than 400 °C, that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase, and/or that react with the second [said] phase to stable compounds. The [inventive] mixture, by providing the second phase, is effective in supporting the fine structure of the first phase against the forces of surface tensions during the sintering process. During sintering, the second phase remains thermally stable and substantially chemically inert with respect to the first phase.

1762/PCT

14.9.99

English translation of the International Patent Application
No. PCT/CH99/00434 "Mixture of two particulate phases used
5 in the production of a green compact that can be sintered
at higher temperatures" in the name of Stratec Medical AG
et al.

10 Mixture of two particulate phases used in the production of
a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures

The invention relates to a mixture as claimed in the
precharacterising part of claim 1, a method for producing
said mixture, and applications thereof.

15

Metallic structures with interconnecting pores,
particularly if containing higher pore volumes and,
consequently, extremely thin cell walls, present the
problem, due to their high specific surface area, of being
20 subject to an intense sintering activity. If a structure of
this type, originally consisting of smaller metal
particles, is to be sintered to a sufficiently solid and
dense, shaped body, this will generally, for three-
dimensionally extending phases, necessitate temperatures of
25 at least about 75 to 80 percent of the melting temperature.
This temperature must be selected because the volume
diffusion necessary for the redensification of the sintered
structure would not take place quick enough at lower
temperatures. However, a metal structure with
30 interconnecting pores characterised by a high degree of
porosity consists to a great extent of internal surface
areas, and, therefore, its sintering behaviour throughout
the entire sintering process is largely characterised by

surface diffusion, which requires a considerably lower thermal activation. The application of the above-mentioned sintering temperatures, which are normally necessary for producing a dense, metallic structure, will thus inevitably
5 result in a reduction of the internal surface area. Due to the effect of the surface tension, a more or less significant shrinkage of the shaped body will occur, which, on the one hand, has a negative influence on the overall dimensions of the body and, on the other hand, leads to a
10 reduction in pore volume. This process may be avoided by reducing the sintering temperature to lower values, which correspond to the thermal activation necessary for surface diffusion to take place. Although it is possible, in doing so, to largely maintain the macrogeometry of the shaped
15 body, only thin sintering necks are formed between adjacent metal particles and the shaped body thus presents only an insufficient strength. The effect described above makes it practically impossible for fine-structured, shaped bodies with interconnecting pores having cell walls in the range
20 of a few micrometers and pore diameters of less than 0.5 mm to be exposed to a normal sintering process: the surface tension acting as a driving force will cause the pores initially present in the green compact to become smaller and smaller while the cell walls are getting thicker and
25 thicker.

In metallurgical and ceramic technology, numerous methods for producing shaped bodies with interconnecting pores are known. The simplest method consists in using an appropriate
30 binder to compress a loosely arranged mass of particles so as to form a shaped body and to sinter this shaped body subsequently. If in doing so the density is inferior to 95 percent of the theoretical value, the body will

automatically have interconnecting pores. Bodies fabricated in this way, such as those typically produced for self-lubricating bearings, however, consist of a pore network displaying the negative image of the metal particles by which it is surrounded. Said network consists of narrow, sharp-edged pore channels and as the cohesion of the particles must be assured by means of the contact surfaces existing between them, it is not possible to achieve porosity rates which are considerably higher than 50 percent by volume. For this reason, this type of manufacturing has to be ruled out a priori for numerous functional applications, for example in the field of medical implants.

15 In ceramic sintering technology, for example in the production of abrasive disks, particles of a second phase, together with a binder, are frequently added to the mixture and, subsequent to sintering, eliminated again therefrom at lower temperatures, leaving behind a network of cavities. 20 To this end, naphthalene balls may, for example, be added to the abrasive particles before the sintering process. These balls provide a hollow volume about which the finer particles of the ceramic phase are arranged. As the naphthalene balls vaporize at temperatures below 100 DEG C, 25 the only function of the balls is to provide pore volume in the green compact and the subsequent sintering process must be conducted in such a way that the specified dimensional limits for the abrasive disk are respected, which requires a high degree of empirical experience, as far as the 30 adequate choice of processing duration and temperature is concerned.

In cases in which the composition of a porous, metallic, shaped body includes the use of binders for making up a green compact, it must be possible to eliminate these binders under reducing and/or neutral atmospheric conditions at very low temperatures, thus excluding any risk of an absorption of binder components by the metallic matrix, because unlike in ceramic systems oxidizing burning out is generally not practicable. Such binder systems are usually selected from the group of organic compounds and may be eliminated from the sintered compact practically without leaving a trace at temperatures below 200 to 400 DEG C through degradation and/or vaporization. They include thermoplastic binders, for example paraffins or waxes, partially mixed with polymers such as PE, PP and with further additives as for example carboxylic acid and its esters, thermosetting binders, e.g. furan resins, or gel binders such as aqueous solutions of methyl cellulose.

Conventionally, sintering processes are primarily used in order to obtain a metallic body which is as dense as possible. For this reason, the elimination of the binder phase already at very low temperatures is of no importance, or rather, on the contrary, is even a prerequisite for obtaining the highest possible density. For the normal process, it is perfectly sufficient that the binderless green compact keeps merely a rudimentary density so as to maintain its shape. However, if a structure with interconnecting pores and above all with thin cell walls is to be realised, an early elimination of the binder and of the pore-forming phase supporting the structure turns out to be of great disadvantage. The pore structure is now exposed without protection to the forces of surface tension, and the shaped body begins to shrink, the cell

walls becoming thicker and thicker and the channels between the interconnecting pores being increasingly closed. Here, the definite geometry of the shaped body is a function of the local pore geometry (radius of curvature) as well as of processing time and temperature and, therefore, cannot be controlled with precision.

US 5,034,186 SHIMAMUNE ET ALII discloses a method according to which a highly porous surface layer is produced on a titanium-based electrode by mixing a fine-particle titanium powder with up to 75 percent by volume of a magnesium powder. Unlike thermally unstable, organic pore forming materials, the magnesium particles remain in the mixture at higher temperatures and exert a stabilizing influence, but, at the same time, produce magnesium vapour which due to its high reactivity may react with e.g. oxidic or nitrogenous decomposition products that occur during the sintering of the first metal phase, said reaction resulting in the formation of magnesium oxide or magnesium nitride, which leads to a strong expansion of the pore cavities, which may, eventually, give rise to microcracking.

The invention is intended to provide a remedy for all the disadvantages mentioned above and is in particular effective in supporting the fine structure of the first phase against the forces of surface tension occurring during the sintering process by providing a second phase which during the sintering process remains thermally stable and substantially chemically inert with respect to the first phase.

According to the invention, this object is achieved by means of a mixture of two particulate phases according to

the features of claim 1 which form a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures, wherein A) the first phase contains particles that consist of a metal and/or a metal alloy and/or a metal compound; and B) the second
5 phase contains particles selected from the group of the inorganic compounds which at temperatures beyond 400 DEG C do not release any decomposition products that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase and/or react with said phase to form stable compounds.

10

In accordance with claim 1, it is thus an important characteristic of the particles of the second phase, designed to provide a volume of empty spaces of a desired geometry within the mixture, that, on the one hand, they
15 belong to the group of inorganic compounds, generally provided with a considerably higher thermal stability, and, on the other hand, said inorganic compounds do not release any decomposition products which either dissolve interstitially in the sintering metal phase or react with
20 said phase to form stable compounds. In both cases this will generally lead to an embrittlement of the metal phase. According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, a releasing of these detrimental elements is prevented in so far as either the bonds by which these potentially
25 dangerous elements are contained in the second phase are so strong that at the sintering temperature they are not set free for interaction with the metal phase, or the halogenides of the alkali metals or the alkaline earth metals are selected as inorganic compounds, which, on the
30 one hand, have high melting and evaporating temperatures and, on the other hand, do not contain said detrimental elements. Incidentally, since in metallurgy there are no systems known which are not, at least in infinitesimal

proportions, liable to thermal disintegration, the expression "are not set free for interaction with the metal phase" is to be understood as meaning that the amounts set free are so small that the mechanical properties of the metal phase are not negatively influenced by them.

The elements interstitially soluble in a metal phase include carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sulphur, and phosphorus. It is, however, permissible for the sintering of titanium structures to use for example calcium oxide as a second phase, since the bonds by which the oxygen is contained in calcium oxide are so strong that the titanium is not capable of deoxygenising the second phase, which would lead to an embrittlement.

According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, sodium chloride, calcium fluoride as well as cryolites are used to compose the second phase.

The particles of the first phase may contain metals and their alloys as well as metal compounds. If metal compounds are used, preference is given, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention, to thermally unstable oxides, nitrides or hydrides which when exposed to sintering are decomposed into their respective metals. The selection of hydrides is in so far of particular interest as on the one hand they are thermally unstable and therefore disintegrate relatively easily, whereas, on the other hand, their decomposition product is hydrogen, a reducing gas which, due to its high rate of diffusion - provided the hydrogen potential of the environment is sufficiently low, for example through the action of a vacuum or an inert gas - may rapidly be eliminated from the sintering metal phase.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the first phase consists of titanium or titanium alloys and/or titanium hydride. The alkali halogenides or the alkaline earth
5 halogenides are particularly suitable materials for composing the second phase, as these compounds do not contain carbon, nitrogen, or oxygen, generally known to be readily absorbed by titanium, which in doing so loses a great deal of its tenacity. These halogenides are known, in
10 part, for playing a role in the normal production process of titanium. Magnesium chloride, for example, occurs in Kroll's process as a chemically inert by-product of the reaction between titanium chloride and magnesium, along with titanium sponge, the principle product of this
15 reaction; or in another reduction process sodium iodide results along with titanium as a decomposition product of titanium iodide.

As far as their geometry and their composition are
20 concerned, the two phases of the mixture which make up the shaped body may immediately consist of the particles of the two phases that are mixed together (in this case the term "particle" refers actually to the corresponding powder particles that compose the respective phases). However, it
25 is also possible that prior to being mixed with the other phase, the powder particles of one phase are shaped into simple agglomerates, such as balls or even more complex geometrical structures, by means of a suitable binder, before allowing said particles to become mixed with the
30 particles of the other phase, the powder particles of which may, for example, equally have been previously agglomerated. If the composition of the particles of one phase includes a binder which would give off detrimental

decomposition products to the metal phase during the sintering process, it must be possible to eliminate said binder at temperatures below those at which the sintering process starts - as is the case for binder systems used on
5 a superior level for binding the two phases. Generally, organic binder phases such as those described above in connection with the injection moulding process are used for this purpose.

10 As stated above, the principle object of the method according to the invention is to obtain a rigid, metallic cell structure while maintaining the inner surface areas and volumes. This object is primarily achieved by the fact that the second phase, designed to provide a volume of
15 empty spaces, continues to exert its supporting action even after the sintering temperature has been reached. Generally, the efficiency of this process can be said to turn out the better the lower the temperatures are at which the sintering process leads to a dense cell structure. This
20 may be realised, in accordance with claim one, by using easily decomposable metal compounds in addition to the metal powders to form the first phase. In the sintering technique of titanium powders, titanium hydride is sometimes used as a sintering adjuvant. Whereas normal
25 titanium powders necessitate temperatures in a range of between 1,200 and 1,300 DEG C for a dense sintering process to take place, fine-grained titanium hydride powders disintegrate already at temperatures over 600 DEG C, depending on the hydrogen partial pressure of the
30 environment, and the sintering process of the nascent titanium may start at temperatures as low as below 800 DEG C.

It is advisable to have only part of the particles coated. As with smaller particles even thin coating thicknesses may lead to too great an increase in concentration on the respective element, it may be advisable to coat for example only 10 percent of the particles, so as to obtain a thinner coating thickness. The experiment of producing a titanium alloy containing 6 percent of titanium would, for example, result in the formation of extremely thin-layered aluminium coatings.

According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the production of shaped bodies may also be realised without the addition of a binder by using a loose powder sintering technique which consists in filling the well-mixed
5 particles of the first and second phases, using, if necessary, a compacting means such as a vibrator, into a mould which is thermally and chemically stable at the sintering temperature. In the case of a chemically highly reactive metal phase, such as titanium or its alloys,
10 generally known to attack most ceramic moulds, said mould may alternatively consist of one of the materials to be used, according to claim 4, for the second phase, for example sodium chloride. A mould of this type made of sodium chloride is stable up to a temperature of 801 DEG C.
15 Said mould will melt only beyond this temperature, as do the salt particles present within the shaped body, said shaped body thus exposed from within and without having undergone enough presintering at this temperature so as to have reached a sufficient degree of inherent stability. It
20 goes without saying that for the treatment of less reactive metals said loose powder sintering process may also be carried out using permanent moulds made of ceramic or metal. If the permanent mould used is made of metal, its surface must be adequately smoothed in order to avoid the
25 occurrence of diffusion weldings.

According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the shaped body consisting of the first and second phases may also be formed into a green compact and stabilized by means
30 of a third binder phase which, by analogy with powder injection moulding, is eliminated from the shaped body prior to the beginning of the sintering process, properly speaking, by means of decomposition and/or evaporation,

leaving behind a shaped body with a sufficient degree of green strength. Unlike in powder injection moulding, where this binder phase fills up the space between the metal particles to a high degree in order to achieve advantageous rheological properties, thus necessitating a prolonged and difficult dewaxing process, the binder phase of the method according to the invention may in many cases be used in a considerably lower concentration, since it only has the function of assuring that the particles of the two phases stick together on their points of contact, so that a shaped body with sufficient rigidity is created. The degassing process of the binder is facilitated by the presence of sufficiently dimensioned channels permitting said process to take place in a simple and rapid manner. Its duration merely depends on the minimum time which is necessary for the shaped body to obtain a sufficient degree of green strength. However, if the injection moulding process is used for the production of shaped bodies, the binder is subject, in terms of quantity, to the usual conditions required for obtaining a sufficient injectability in the injection moulding machine. In this case the dewaxing process will then of course be slowed down correspondingly.

In the following, the method according to the invention will be described with reference to several embodiments.

Example 1

A first example describes the production of a metal structure with interconnecting pores shaped in the form of a cylinder made of stainless steel, having a diameter of 20 mm and a length of 80 mm. For this purpose, a steel powder with a percentage composition of about 18 percent by mass of chromium and 9 percent by mass of nickel having a

medium particle size of 20 μ m was mixed with 80 percent by volume of approximately ball-shaped calcium carbonate particles having a medium diameter of 0.2 mm, adding 2 percent by mass of an organic paraffin, and compressed in a mould so as to form shaped bodies. The shaped bodies were subsequently placed in a protective atmosphere furnace and subjected to the following temperature programme:

	3h	25 - 300 DEG C	flowing argon
10	3h	300 - 1,100 DEG C	flowing forming gas (93 % argon, 7 % hydrogen)
	6h	1,100 DEG C	flowing forming gas

At a temperature range of 900 DEG C, the calcium carbonate was decomposed into burnt lime, with delivery of carbonic acid. This process was accompanied by only a slight shrinkage of the calcium oxide particles, the substantial volume shrinkage being due to the formation of very fine pore channels in the calcium oxide particles. For this reason, only a very slight diameter and length reduction of the cylinder as compared to the initial state was observed. After termination of the sintering process, the sintered sample body was cooled down and removed from the furnace. The shaped body was subsequently immersed for several days into a strongly diluted and briskly stirred hydrochloric acid, whereupon the calcium oxide was completely hydrated and thus eliminated from the shaped body. The result was a highly rigid, high-tenacity shaped body having a relative density of 32 percent, referred to the density of stainless steel.

Example 2

A second example describes the production of an interconnecting pore structure in the form of a stainless steel filter having a height of 8 mm and a G1/8'' external screw thread, the pore size, however, being smaller almost
5 by the power of ten than that of the preceding example. Since the filter is required to have regular, spheroidally convex cavities with pore diameters of maximally 35 μm , it would be necessary to use metal particles with particle sizes of less than 500 nm, for only powders of this
10 fineness are capable of constituting the thin cell walls around the volume forming phase, which in the present example consisted equally of calcium carbonate particles having a medium diameter of 30 μm . Such stainless steel powders, however, are not commercially available, and their
15 production would be extremely expensive. For this reason, a mixture of iron oxide, chromium oxide and nickel oxide stoichiometrically corresponding to the alloy was used, with the medium particle size of all particles being inferior to 500 nm. This powder constituting the first
20 phase was homogeneously mixed with the calcium carbonate balls without adding a binder and subsequently filled into a thin-walled alumina mould. This mould had previously been fabricated using the lost-wax process by investment casting of a corresponding wax pattern. This mould was placed in a
25 protective atmosphere furnace and subsequently subjected to the following time-temperature programme:

5h	25	- 1,350 DEG C	flowing, pulsating, technical hydrogen
30	3h	1,350 DEG C	flowing, pulsating, high-purity hydrogen

In order to ensure that the reduction process of the oxides took place under favourable kinetic conditions, the hydrogen pressure, which normally was 1,050 mbar, was increased for 10 seconds to 1,500 mbar every 2 minutes. By this measure, the steam formed during the reduction process was rarefied and fresh hydrogen was continually allowed to reach the inner surface areas of the shaped body. After cooling down, the shaped body was removed from the furnace and washed in diluted acid. Due to the fact that the reduction of metal oxides implies a considerable decrease in volume and that, on the other hand, the calcium oxide particles largely maintained their external shape, this resulted not so much in a shrinkage of the shaped body as such but rather led to an increase in its degree of porosity, as the contact points had a smaller diameter due to the strong shrinkage which had occurred during the reduction process. The grinding pattern of the structure showed an austenitic matrix largely free of non-metallic inclusions, which was equally confirmed by the good tenacity properties of the shaped body.

Example 3

A third example describes the fabrication of a medical implant for the head of a hip prosthesis made of pure titanium. For this purpose, a mixture consisting of 60.7 percent by mass of sodium chloride balls which had previously been screened out to a diameter of between 0.6 and 0.85 mm was mixed with 21.3 percent by mass of titanium hydride particles having a particle size of between 1 and 3 μm , adding 18 percent of a saturated, aqueous sodium chloride solution containing 5 percent of isopropyl alcohol, so as to form a homogeneous paste. This paste was inserted under vibration into a metal-reinforced, two-piece

silicone rubber mould and subsequently dried during 24 hours in a drying cabinet at 80 DEG C. The demolded body was subsequently placed in a protective atmosphere annealing furnace and subjected to the following time-
 5 temperature programme:

	6h	25 - 300 DEG C	pulsating	argon
			(1,000/1,500 mbar)	
	2h	300 - 780 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)
10	10h	780 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)
	2h	780 - 1,100 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)
	5h	1,100 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)

During a first heating-up to a temperature of 300 DEG C,
 15 the water and the organic binder were eliminated. In this process, titanium hydride turned out to be chemically totally inert with respect to water and the binder. This is in line with the findings taught in specialised literature, where it is described that titanium hydride - as long as
 20 during its decomposition it releases greater quantities of hydrogen - is totally protected against the intrusion of external gases. Under the test conditions described above, the decomposition of titanium hydride starts slightly below 600 DEG C and is largely finished at 780 DEG C. At the same
 25 time, the sintering process starts at the contact points of the freshly formed titanium particles. The temperature was stabilised at 780 DEG C, as this temperature is slightly inferior to the melting temperature of sodium chloride (801 DEG C), so that the structure may be exposed to the
 30 sintering process for 10 hours without shrinkage. Subsequently, the temperature was increased to 1,100 DEG C for two hours, during which the sodium chloride melted and mostly ran out of the shaped body. During the following

five hours, the greatest part of the remaining sodium chloride evaporated, and simultaneously a linear shrinkage of 18 percent was observed, which, however, was effective in a uniform manner in all directions. Almost completely freed of sodium chloride, the shaped body was subsequently rinsed for several hours in running water. The result was a structure with a degree of porosity of 79.5 percent by volume provided with interconnecting pores having a medium pore size of 0.62 mm which were evenly distributed in an arrangement approximately resembling a densest sphere packing. Mechanical trials showed that this structure was characterised by a considerable degree of brittleness, which indicated that the content of oxygen dissolved in the titanium was too high. This results from the high reactivity of the titanium, i.e. even small amounts of impurities present in the titanium hydride, which on its surface contains thin layers of oxide, may be sufficient for bringing about this deterioration of the mechanical properties, since a shaped body of this type comprises a huge internal surface area. According to claim 17, the shaped body, placed together with calcium granulate in an evacuated, thin-walled steel retort, was inserted into the protective atmosphere furnace and exposed to a temperature of 1,000 DEG C during 4 hours. The calcium steam pressure produced during this process created a deep oxidation potential on the inner surface areas of the shaped body so that the oxygen by way of solid state diffusion diffused from the thin cell walls towards the outside where it reacted with the steam to form calcium oxide. After this treatment the shaped body was equally washed with diluted hydrochloric acid, and this titanium body displayed an excellent tenacity behaviour.

Example 4

A fourth example shows a case in which a solid titanium component is coated with a surface layer made of porous titanium. For this purpose, fine calcium fluoride particles
 5 were agglomerated with an alginate to form balls having a diameter of 0.5 mm. These balls were subsequently mixed with a mixture consisting of 90 percent by mass of pure titanium powder having a medium particle size of 15 μ m and 10 percent by mass of titanium hydride, adding an
 10 alcohol/wax mixture, and stirred to a viscid paste. Subsequently, this paste was manually applied on the electrode to form a layer having a thickness of approximately 3 mm and dried during 48 hours in the drying cabinet at 110 DEG C. Subsequently, the following
 15 temperature-time programme was run:

6h	25 - 300 DEG C	pulsating	argon
		(1,000/1,500 mbar)	
2h	300 - 1,250 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)
20 2h	1,250 DEG C	pulsating argon	(30/10 mbar)

Since calcium fluoride melts only at temperatures beyond 1,400 DEG C, the particles remained inside the shaped body and, therefore, had to be eliminated subsequent to the
 25 sintering process by means of a chemical solution. At this point, the advantage became evident which resides in the fact that the calcium fluoride particles had previously been agglomerated into spherical bodies based on much finer powder particles. Once the alginate had disintegrated at
 30 temperatures of below 300 DEG C, the remaining, loosely arranged masses of calcium fluoride particles were kept in place by the titanium particles and titanium hydride particles surrounding them. However, as soon as the

sintering process of the titanium phase started, which in this example took place more rapidly and at considerably higher temperatures, the loosely arranged calcium particle masses were exposed to a compressive force and thus prevented the surface tension from causing a strong shrinkage of the structure. Subsequent to the sintering process, the cooled-down titanium body was rinsed in a well-stirred complexone solution during several days in the course of which the calcium fluoride particles were slowly dissolved.

Claims

1. A mixture of two particulate phases to be used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures, wherein A) the first phase contains particles that consist of a metal and/or a metal alloy and/or a metal compound; and B) the second phase contains particles selected from the group of the inorganic compounds which at temperatures beyond 400 DEG C do not release any decomposition products that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase and/or react with said phase to form stable compounds.
2. A mixture as claimed in claim 1, characterised in that for the second phase inorganic compounds are used which contain elements interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase in a bond the free enthalpy of formation of which at the sintering temperature is more negative than the free solution enthalpy of this element in the sintering metal phase and/or the free reaction enthalpy with this metal phase.
3. A mixture as claimed in claim 2, characterised in that the second phase does not contain any particles which contain carbon.
4. A mixture as claimed in claim 2, characterised in that the second phase does not contain any particles which contain nitrogen.
5. A mixture as claimed in claim 2, characterised in that the second phase does not contain any particles which contain sulphur.

6. A mixture as claimed in claim 2, characterised in that the second phase does not contain any particles which contain phosphorus.

5

7. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 6, characterised in that the inorganic compounds are selected from the group of the alkali halogenides or alkaline earth halogenides.

10

8. A mixture as claimed in claim 7, characterised in that the inorganic compounds are selected from the following group: NaCl, CaF₂, K₃AlF₆ and Na₃AlF₆.

15

9. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 8, characterised in that the bodies of the first and/or the second phase are agglomerates or shaped corpuscles of powder particles which are kept in place by means of a binder that disintegrates and/or evaporates at temperatures below the beginning of the sintering process.

20

10. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 9, characterised in that the first phase comprises thermally unstable oxides and/or nitrides and/or hydrides of at least one of the metals which form the sintered alloy.

25

11. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 10, characterised in that the first phase comprises particles consisting of titanium or titanium alloys.

30

12. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 11, characterised in that the first phase comprises particles consisting of titanium hydride.

13. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 12, characterised in that at least part of the particles of the first phase are provided with a metal coating which in contact with the other components of the first phase form, at least at the beginning of the sintering process, a low melting point alloy and that after termination of the sintering process the concentration of this metal in the alloy corresponds to the desired value.

14. A mixture as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 13, characterised in that in addition to the first and second phases it contains a third phase in the form of an organic or inorganic binder in a composition corresponding to that used in powder injection moulding.

15. A method for producing a shaped body that can be sintered at higher temperatures as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 14, characterised in that the first and second phases composing the mixture are homogeneously mixed and that subsequently said mixture is inserted into a mould which at the sintering temperature is thermally and chemically stable.

16. A method for producing a shaped body that can be sintered at higher temperatures, as claimed in any of the claims 1 to 14, characterised in that the three phases composing the mixture are homogeneously mixed and that subsequently said homogeneous mixture is mechanically compacted to form a green compact.

17. A shaped body capable of being sintered, which is obtained by one of the methods according to claim 15 or 16.

18. A method for producing shaped metal bodies with interconnecting pore structures by using the shaped body capable of being sintered as claimed in claim 17, characterised by the following procedure step: heating of the green compact until the particles of the first phase are sintered so as to form an interconnecting pore structure, the particles of the second phase being eliminated from the pores of the shaped body during or subsequent to the sintering process.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18, characterised in that the elimination of the particles of the second phase takes place prior to or during the sintering process at a temperature beyond 400 DEG C.

20. A method as claimed in claim 18, characterised in that the elimination of the particles of the second phase takes place subsequent to the sintering process by dissolving out said particles using a solvent.

21. A method as claimed in any of the claims 15 to 20, characterised in that after having undergone the sintering process, the shaped body is treated with a liquid and/or a vaporous alkali metal or alkaline earth metal.

22. A shaped metal body obtained in accordance with any of the method claims 15 to 21.

23. A shaped metal body as claimed in claim 22, characterised in that the pores of the interconnecting pore structure have a diameter inferior to 0.4 mm.

24. A utilisation of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 22 or 23 as a surgical implant or as a coating for a surgical implant.

5 25. A utilisation of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 22 or 23 as a structural member for applications in lightweight construction.

10 26. A utilisation of the shaped metal body as claimed in claim 22 or 23 as an electrode material.

Abstract

The mixture consists of two particulate phases to be used in the production of a green compact that can be sintered at higher temperatures, wherein A) the first phase contains particles that consist of a metal and/or a metal alloy and/or a metal compound; and B) the second phase contains particles selected from the group of the inorganic compounds which at temperatures beyond 400 DEG C do not release any decomposition products that are interstitially soluble in the sintering metal phase and/or react with said phase to form stable compounds.

The mixture is in particular effective in supporting, by means of the second phase, the fine structure of the first phase against the forces of surface tension occurring during the sintering process. During the sintering process, the second phase remains thermally stable and substantially chemically inert with respect to the first phase.

1762/U9

PTO/SB/01A (10-00)

Approved for use through 10/31/2002. OMB 0661-0032
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**DECLARATION (37 CFR 1.63) FOR UTILITY OR DESIGN APPLICATION USING AN
APPLICATION DATA SHEET (37 CFR 1.76)**

As the below named inventor(s), I/we declare that:

This declaration is directed to:

☐ The attached application, or
☒ Application No. PCT/CH99/00434, filed on September 14, 1999,

☐ as amended on _____ (if applicable);

I/we believe that I/we am/are the original and first inventor(s) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought;

I/we have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified application, including the claims, as amended by any amendment specifically referred to above;

I/we acknowledge the duty to disclose to the United States Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me/us to be material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56, including material information which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the National or PCT International filing date of the continuation-in-part application, if applicable; and

All statements made herein of my/own knowledge are true, all statements made herein on information and belief are believed to be true, and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. 1001, and may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

FULL NAME OF INVENTOR(S)Inventor one: Heinrich Feichtinger Date: June 2, 2002Signature: *Heinrich Feichtinger* Citizen of: CH - Schaffhausen

Inventor two: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Citizen of: _____

Inventor three: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Citizen of: _____

Inventor four: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Citizen of: _____

☐ Additional inventors are being named on _____ additional form(s) attached hereto.

Burden Hour Statement. This collection of information is required by 35 U.S.C. 115 and 37 CFR 1.63. The information is used by the public to file (and the PTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This form is estimated to take 1 minute to complete. This time will vary depending upon the needs of the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you are required to complete this form should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, Washington, DC 20231. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. SEND TO: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231.